

**Testimony of The Honorable Laura A. Gillen (NY-04)**  
**“Member Day Hearing”**  
**House Committee on Appropriations**  
**Subcommittee on Homeland Security**  
**April 9, 2025**

Chairman Amodei, Ranking Member Underwood, and Members of the Homeland Security Subcommittee,

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today on behalf of my constituents in the Fourth Congressional District of New York to urge you to continue to make critical, much-needed investments in the upcoming fiscal year to help secure our southern border.

Mr. Chairman, our immigration system is broken. For too long, the federal government has failed to do enough to secure our borders or adequately enforce our laws. Every day, my constituents deal with the effects of this failure, including an influx of migrants coming into our State and our communities -- undermining public safety, and putting a strain on our schools, law enforcement, and local governments.

As a result, our communities on Long Island are overburdened, and taxpayers are left on the hook. Without federal action, we will only continue to struggle to keep up. This simply cannot continue.

It's my priority in Congress to work across the aisle to secure the border, fix our broken asylum system, support legal pathways to immigration, and prevent criminals and gang members from entering our country and threatening our communities.

Members of both parties should agree that we must achieve situational awareness and operational control over our southern border. That is why I urge you to invest in proven and effective methods to strengthen and enhance our border security. That includes hiring more border patrol agents, deploying drones and “smart” technology along the border, building strategic physical barriers, and supporting cooperation with state and local law enforcement to help prevent individuals from crossing the border illegally.

First, I urge the Committee to provide necessary funding for U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) to hire an additional 10,000 Border Patrol Agents. As you know, the Fiscal Year 2024 funding bill called for a staffing target of 22,000 Border Patrol Agents, and CBP has fallen short of that goal. At the same time, the Government Accountability Office has reported that CBP is expecting a huge surge of upcoming retirements in the next few years. I agree with the President that we need to hire thousands of additional Border Patrol agents, and provide incentives to help recruit and retain them, and I urge the Committee to provide the resources necessary to get this done.

Second, I strongly support deploying advanced technology, including unmanned aerial systems equipped with thermal imaging and AI-enabled facial recognition technology to help stop violent criminals and gang members trafficking fentanyl across the border. That is why I urge the Committee to provide funding necessary to ensure that CBP Air and Marine Operations can achieve 110,000 annual flight hours in FY26 and operate drones along the border 24 hours per day, 7 days a week. Increased aerial surveillance

and other technology should be supplemented by additional funding to help construct physical, strategic barriers where necessary along the border.

Third, I urge the Committee to continue to invest in programs that strengthen cooperation between the federal government and local law enforcement to secure the border and keep our communities safe. That includes programs like the Department of Homeland Security's Operation Stonegarden, which provides grants to state and local law enforcement to support border security operations. This program was funded at \$90 million in FY 2023 and FY2022 but was reduced by \$9 million in FY2024. I respectfully request \$110 million in funding for Operation Stonegarden in FY26.

Finally, I urge the Committee to provide dedicated resources to help reimburse our local law enforcement for costs they incur in dealing with the migrant crisis. I support the 287(g) agreement between Nassau County and ICE, because our local law enforcement officers know our communities best and can work with federal immigration authorities to ensure enforcement is targeted and properly carried out. However, without any additional funding, we are just asking our law enforcement to do more, with less. That is why I am eager to work with you and our colleagues to help provide additional funding to alleviate the burden on Nassau County and other jurisdictions that participate in the program.

Mr. Chairman, and Ranking Member, thank you for your time today and for your work on this Committee to protect our homeland, and keep our communities safe. I look forward to working with you and colleagues on both sides of the aisle to secure the

border, fix our broken asylum system, and protect legal pathways to immigration that benefit our economy and our country. Thank you, and I yield back.